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THE NORTH-AMERICAN REVIEW.

Rhoda—A novel.—By the author of “Things by their right names,” “Plain Sense,” &c. 2 vols. 12mo. Boston—Published by Wells & Lilly.

THIS novel presents a lively and pretty faithful picture of fashionable life. Its moral influence is favourable to virtue. The first deviations from principle are well delineated in the most conspicuous character, and the progressive steps, from brisk animal spirits to levity, folly, disregard of obligations, imprudence, and finally to remorse and misfortune, are skilfully traced. This character is a susceptible, brilliant, fanciful woman, whose dispositions are always good, but her conduct often wrong. She makes just reflections, but has not sufficient strength of character to execute her good purposes, and is continually liable to be diverted from propriety and rectitude, by the artful, who are her inferiours in point of understanding. She is, in short, one of those lovely bewitching creatures, whom every body admires and excuses, but whose conduct nobody approves.

The work is not remarkable for spirit and animation. We cannot promise the reader that his interest will not flag a little in the first part of the second volume, but we can assure him, that he will be well compensated for persisting in the persusal. It belongs to the numerous and constantly increasing class of productions, in which fiction is brought home to daily occurrences and observations. Readers are apt to complain of such, that they are monotonous and ordinary; they do not sufficiently abound in “moving incidents,” frightful situations, and apprehensions of direful events which never happen. We do not affect to proscribe all the agitating fictions, with which the novel-reading fair daily distress themselves. Feigned as well as real sufferings may sometimes have a salutary influence, and variety is desirable for its own sake, and then an occasional interruption of the more gentle undulations of emotion, by the

whirls of transport, or the storms of the turbulent passions, may leave the mental atmosphere more lucid and serene. But we would not always be tossed and tempest-driven—let us sometimes be satisfied with the face of nature in its more usual state, not violently agitated, nor yet perfectly tranquil. It requires greater progress in the arts to exhibit with this aspect, it demands greater skill and delicacy of execution in the artist, and an improved susceptibility and taste in the observer. This truth is no less apparent in other arts, than in that of writing novels. Young belles, who have not been trained into a perception of real beauty and elegance, by judicious mothers and governesses, flutter out of the boarding school in the most brilliant hues, and by their glitter, dazzle the eyes, and turn the heads of the poor beaux, not yet far advanced in their teens. Painters, in the early period of their art, are apt to choose extravagant subjects and situations; and having set them forth in glaring colours, astonish the well-meaning multitude. In every art, the sort of specimens which children and the unskilful most admire, is the same with the masterpieces of a ruder state. The writers of fictitious narratives began with superhuman characters, and preternatural incidents, and thus kindled the admiration and curiosity of their rude readers, who would have gone to sleep over a probable story, elegantly told. Authors and readers early quitted the wild regions of giants, and dragons, and enchantments; but a great distance was to be passed over, before they could arrive at their proper home, among natural objects and real persons. Each alternately led the way, the author now guiding the publick taste, and now being directed by it. Their perils and disasters, by the way, have not been few; for they have often been shut up in Gothick towers, thrown into uncomfortable dungeons, pursued by apparitions, and were very ill used by monks in convents, and by robbers in deserts. Even after infernal personages and miraculous events had been abandoned, and it was required of an author to account for what he caused to take place in a more satisfactory way, the imaginations of men were for a long time affected by the terrors with which they had been surrounded, and they often mistook a figure in a piece of tattered tapestry for a spirit, fresh from the nether world, and would convert a crazy chateau into an enchanted castle, and indulge for a time in

the illusion, that there was something beyond the laws of nature, in their surprises, successes, and failures. At length all pretence of mystery ceased, and writers, who do not professedly lay their scenes beyond the limits of experience, must accept for machinery, such as they are, the laws of nature, and the passions of men. They are not confined to what is common and familiar. Strong passions still exist, and extraordinary events occur, and whatever is real, may well find a place in fiction. Many are led, by boldness and energy of genius, to prefer them, while others resort to them through weakness, and make use of them—that they may create that interest by their incidents, which they are unable to produce by a skilful management; they dress what they serve up, but rudely, but then they make up, as well as they can for this defect, by the number and profusion of dishes. The modern novels are generally better calculated to produce delight and improvement, than wonder and agitation. They answer all the useful purposes of a lesson, without its formality and tediousness. In them, we have the most minute and finished representations of manners. The privilege of using narrative or dialogue, and the liberty of detailing the most minute incidents, and marking the most trifling occurrences, provided a regard be had to grace and propriety, give the writer more freedom and play, than he is allowed in any other kind of composition, and enable him to bring out, and exhibit those subtle and evanescent accompaniments, to which characters and actions owe a greater part of their beauty and deformity.

We shall not proceed to analyze and review this book, as we can say nothing of it which will not occur to almost every reader, and our purpose in making it the occasion of these few remarks, will be accomplished, if we shall add something towards drawing to it that attention, which we think it deserves.